

Will A Few Watts Electrify The Bull Of The Woods?

By - Paul MacArthur

The hiring of Bill Watts as WCW Vice President had to create quite a number of mixed emotions for Dusty Rhodes. After several years of being the wrestling press' whipping boy, Rhodes finally has someone who will share the pressures and the limelight. That in itself is a double edged sword: Should Rhodes be successful under Watts' direction, Watts will receive all the credit. Should Rhodes fail under Watts' direction, Rhodes not only will receive the blame, but will be out of job, while Watts will be able to blame the booker for the company's failings. For Rhodes there is the major question of is there anything to motivate him in such a situation motivate him, other than a six figure salary? Watts is part of the answer, but just one part.

Since the mid-seventies, Rhodes has been a major wrestling attraction. His success in the WWF, the AWA and the NWA during the seventies and eighties was mirrored by few. His charisma and his talk, combined with his wrestling skills and intelligent booking, made him into one of the largest drawing cards of the past 20 years. Some may discount that as self-promotion, but until the twilight of his wrestling career, Rhodes, as a main event wrestler sold tickets. In fact, aside from Hulk Hogan and Ric Flair, no main event wrestler in the eighties sold more. That may not have always benefited the long term health of the company, but few promoters in wrestling planned for the long term.

During the late seventies and eighties, Rhodes the wrestler was often pushed to the top of the card because Rhodes was the booker, or held considerable clout in the organizations in which he participated. In 1981, a young Ted DiBiase was to win the National Wrestling Alliance Heavyweight Championship. It never happened as Rhodes pulled a power play and started his second title reign. It wasn't the last time DiBiase's dream was pulled away, nor was it the last time a wrestler found reality to be contradictory to a promoter's promises. However, as a wrestler protecting his future, Rhodes' decision benefited Rhodes and that was his primary concern.

Success as a wrestler was always paramount for Rhodes. This desire to be on top, superseded the desire to run a successful promotion. This resulted in numerous judgmental errors, causing the decline of the company he attempted to lead. By the late eighties, his skills had atrophied to almost embarrassing levels, yet he continued to push himself as the promotion's top wrestler. While he still had charisma and that old Rhodes charm, he was no longer a major drawing card. Rhodes, however, failed to see that. He failed to realize the company could be successful without him in the limelight, and that it was time for others to assume the top positions. Despite the number of stars he created over the years, Rhodes still believed the flagship

of the promotion was Dusty Rhodes "The American Dream." Slowly, all the years of work Rhodes put into building a promotion went to waste. While Jim Crockett Promotions' bankruptcy was the result of numerous organizational problems and ill-advised business decisions, Rhodes' booking was a major factor as it contributed to their declining house show business.

The failure of Jim Crockett Promotions resulted in the Turner buy out. That ultimately led to Rhodes' firing as he flagrantly violated the company's blood ban. Rhodes tried to start a promotion in Florida but soon abandoned it when it became painfully obvious that he could not draw a house alone. The WWF called, and Rhodes answered by becoming one of their top babyfaces. While Rhodes made money, and wielded some power in the WWF, the urge to make the promotion he put so many years of his life into successful, was still there. Even after he paid his dues in the WWF and was about to be pushed in a relatively respectable fashion, he decided to call it quits and went back to WCW to try and started over.

Initially it appeared Rhodes was up to his old tricks with screw job finishes and putting himself in the spotlight. Fortunately, and to Jim Herd's credit, Rhodes was removed from television and relegated strictly to behind the scenes work, with occasional television appearances. Rhodes of course had an answer to this, his son, Dustin. Dustin was pushed as a top babyface to the dismay of many. Though few critics paid attention to crowd reactions, as Dustin quickly got over because he is one of the most talented young wrestlers today. A fact still ignored by far too many who feel Dustin's sole reason for success is nepotism.

Banned from television by corporate edict, Rhodes pushed his son and concentrated on booking the promotion. The results have been mixed. His first pay-per-view was a tremendous show and pulled in a 1.2 percent buy rate. His second pay-per-view was also good and earned a 1.5 percent buy rate. While, it appeared Rhodes was breathing life into the promotion, the life support was only temporary. Between SuperBrawl and the Great American Bash, Rhodes, under Herd's directive, booked World Champion, Ric Flair, in matches that hardly highlighted his talents. While the animosity between Rhodes and Flair had been well known for years, it never stopped Rhodes from effectively promoting Flair in the past and should not have been a factor last year.

Enter Herd. The relationship between Herd and Flair was tenuous at best. The previous year, Herd sought to diminish Flair's value to the promotion, while having no clear cut direction where to go without Flair. Finally, a week before the Great American Bash, Flair was fired, Herd was happy and the company put together their worst PPV in history. Meanwhile, the buy rates continued to decline as the Bash pulled in a 1.0.

Without Flair, the promotion floundered as Rhodes tried to carve out a direction. To his credit, he developed a strong program for Lex Luger with Ron Simmons, brought in Rick Rude, turned Paul E. Dangerously into a killer manager and somehow made Halloween Havoc into an excellent rebound. Unfortunately, he also nearly destroyed any credibility the Light Heavyweight Division would have, used recycled angles and characters, house show business continued at embarrassing levels and the buy rates for Halloween Havoc and Starrcade earned 1.0 and 0.7 buy-rates, respectively.

1992 has been much like 1991, some programs were very good, some were poor and some were in between. There appears to be little long term direction and the promotion seems to be running on auto pilot. Given

Rhodes work schedule, it isn't surprising. If he has been responsible for running as many aspects of the business as some have said, then the work load is too much for one person when dealing on a national scale.

Enter Watts. Some believe Watts is the savior, other believe he is out of touch and some just think it will be interesting, regardless of what direction WCW will take. For Rhodes, however, this is the opportunity of a lifetime. Rhodes will have to work under Watts, which has usurped a significant amount of his power. It has also lessened his responsibilities and will allow him to function with a clear direction and a set of goals. While his ideas will now have to be approved by Watts, this may be the fuel Rhodes needs to put his creative energies to full use. Rhodes has the opportunity to be Watts' right hand man, so to speak. This opportunity could very well be his last chance to run a successful wrestling promotion. With his days in the ring behind him, this is the last chance to be in the limelight. No, he will not hear the cheers. No, tens of thousands of fans won't pack arenas to see him in the main event anymore. Instead, he must accept that those days are history; fond memories to look back upon and share with his grandchildren.

The American Dream must now redefine success. He must take pride with every packed house he produces. He must be happy with every PPV showing an increased buy rate. He needs to accept rising television ratings as barometers of success. The measures of success are changing for Rhodes, but he has the creativity and talent to adapt. He's sold out numerous arenas with his booking and the talent he developed and used. He has a keen eye for the business, but now he must produce. The Bull of the Woods is backed against the wall and he is seeing red. It's time for him to charge ahead and prove that he is a legend in professional wrestling. He's already accomplished that in the ring. Now, it's time for him to do it from behind the scenes.

The Ivan Koloff Interview - Part II

In part II of our Ivan Koloff interview, conducted by David Skolnick, the Russian Bear discusses his wrestling school, training young wrestlers and more intriguing highlights from one of the most storied careers in professional wrestling.

Wrestling Perspective: Tell us about the school. I know you were running it with Bobby Fulton?

Ivan Koloff: I started two years ago (contact Ivan at 704-540-7643 for more information). Bobby Fulton was my partner. As a matter of fact, Paul Jones started with me and bowed out. Bobby's now, I split partnerships with him a couple months ago. He got back from Japan and his time was going to be taken up so much that he really wouldn't be an asset to the school so we talked it over and he started promoting up in Ohio and wrestling quite a bit up there and Jim Cornette started up in Tennessee and Kentucky and they're working together somewhat as far as television and I wish them a lot of luck. As a matter of fact, I'm going up there this Saturday and Sunday to wrestle.

WP: Do you see independents making a comeback?

IK: I sure do. You can see it more and more this year. There's a lot of interest out there. Wrestling's very popular. It's on TV so much and if it's run right, attendance will come up. I've seen it. Bobby Fulton's been very successful in Ohio running it properly, because he knows the business. I think where it's had struggles and a hard time drawing is you look at independent promoters trying to promote not really knowing what they're doing and learned the hard way. Consequently, they lose so much money they usually go bankrupt.

WP: Speaking of bankruptcy, you worked for Joel Goodhart. Why do you think he ran into so many problems towards the end?

IK: I think he probably over extended himself. He brought too many stars in. He tried to go too big, too fast. If he would have just brought four or even six for a big show, talent, known talent, stars, he would have been able to exist a lot longer. But at times he had as much as a dozen, 14 names. Whenever you have big names, transportation guarantees, a lot of them insist on hotels, it was inevitable. Even if he sold out, his cost was more than what his revenue would be. His partners are continuing right now. I went up and wrestled in a club in Philadelphia last month and I'm supposed to go up again this month. They didn't have time to publicize it. They didn't have the radio, but they still broke even and they're happy they did it. They will continue.

WP: What are you looking to do now? Your career is in its thirtieth year.

IK: I believe I'm going to phase out, not because I don't want to continue wrestling. But, for example, I have one ankle I've broke over the years three time that I thought I had just sprained it. Eight months ago, I found through x-rays that it had three fractures in it. It's a matter of time. The more I keep wrestling now, the more I aggravate it. The doctor told me to have an operation and get it fused together. It won't have the mobility on it, but he's very surprised that I'm still able to wrestle. I work out all the time. I keep going, but I think hopefully this year I'll have pretty well phased it out. Maybe once or twice a month I'll keep wrestling and I've got the wrestling school, I'll continue with it. I've gotten into marketing a nutrition product that works very well. That's how come I lost my weight. It's called Omnitrition. Also, security for cars and homes, personal security. It seems to be a thing that's a big need because of crime. I've been doing quite a bit of things with elementary schools with the DARE program. Programs where I go in and encourage kids to get better grades. I go in and they sign a little contract with me that they'll try to bring their grades up. I go back in two or three months and if they've gotten their grades up, I give them an autographed picture and make a big deal about what they've done. It's really worked well. One school said that they had a drug problem and about 40 percent of the kids got their grades up. I was very happy with that. I like that. I've got kids of my own. I think it's a thing that the kids need a figure out there telling them they're doing the right thing by staying off it and encouraging it.

WP: Getting back to your career, I know you had several hot feuds throughout the years, including Jimmy Valiant and you and Krusher against the Road Warriors later on. What's your most memorable moments, excluding of course the victory over Sammartino?

IK: One that stands out is wrestling Andre the Giant. That was the mid-seventies, about '77 in Montreal. A single match. Of course being a giant, the man in his day, there was nobody around that could beat him. That stands out. There were so many memories. Matches against the Rock and Roll Express, the Road Warriors were so impressive. There's people that you really respect, like the Karl Gotches and Lou Thesz and the old timers that I was fortunate enough to meet and wrestle to see what they accomplished. They are the real tough men of professional wrestling.

WP: You mentioned the Rock and Roll Express and the Road Warriors. When people think of tag teams, although they are on total opposite ends, they are two of the most famous teams of all time and you were in the ring with both of them. How do you assess them?

IK: The Road Warriors, to me, it is just a strength type of thing. The mobility, they're very agile for big men.

WP: Are they rough in the ring?

IK: Very much so. It's just like running into a brick wall. Whenever a guy at anytime with ease can just pick you up over his head in a press type of thing, it's definitely somebody that you've got to be very cautious of in the ring and respect because they're tough men, not only in the ring, but in the street, Animal, although he's very tough in the ring is like a gentle giant like Andre and it's a good thing because he'd probably be in a lot of trouble being as strong as he is. Hawk of course to me, he's a street fighter. He's a tough man. I think to assess them in the ring, if they were to have a real basic wrestling background as far as what I teach now at the school, there would be no team around that could even compete with them. What I'm saying is like a Steiner, like the Steiners with all the wrestling that they can do and still have the strength and the size of the Road Warriors, they're would be nobody that could touch them. As far as the Rock and Roll Express, they're very knowledgeable in wrestling and very quick because of their size, they're smaller. They're just loved by the fans. Those kids went crazy for them. All you'd have to do is touch them and they're ready to kill you. They're a good team. It's unfortunate that they're not still wrestling together.

WP: I do recall the match you had with them when they won the title for the first time, it was a 45 minute match.

IK: On television. I remember because it was very hot in that arena. I think it was over 100 degrees outside and I know it had to be about 115 in that ring. I can recall that night I lost 15 pounds alone in that match. In the ring, you could see puddles of sweat. It was so hot. I was in great condition at the time because I was running and everything, but Krusher told me a couple times he was going to pass out. You get to the point where you're dehydrated and loss of fluids. I'll definitely remember that forever.

WP: Do you like wrestling better in singles or with a partner?

IK: At one point, I enjoyed it better in single matches. But that was pretty well all I was doing early in my career. Then after, I really liked the change. It was good because it gave you more experience and it's completely different because not only depending on your partner, but he's depending on you so you have to be there. It's different because you have to tag and timing, there's more psychology to it.

WP: You've been very fortunate to have some good partners, Krusher, Don Kernodle, Graham. I guess that kind of makes it easier to be a tag team partner when you've got those guys.

IK: Oh yeah, Ray Stevens. I had quite a few partners, Kabuki. I can't even remember them all. It does make it easier when you're got someone that's really experienced. At times with Nikita, I had to carry the load more... Vladimir, but that's because they were inexperienced. When you've got somebody that knows the ropes, it's just like having a good official in the ring. It makes it so much easier.

WP: Do you believe that's why Dusty had you team with so many of these rookies?

IK: Yeah. I was even told that they needed me to help try to get them in there to mature them into money makers.

WP: I know you had your work cut out for you with the Powers of Pain. How was it working with those two guys?

IK: Barbarian was quite experienced by the time I started wrestling with them. Warlord was new. Even though he was as big and strong as he was, he wasn't doing a lot of moving around at that time. He really didn't have to when you're that big. To me, if a guy has natural ability, which he had to have, he played

football, whenever you can do the stuff he's doing now like flying tackles. There's so much more he could really do if he would just take the time to learn all the basic moves. Once you get to a point where you're in that kind of position making that kind of money, main events, it's hard to tell a person just take the time to learn it because it will help you that much more. I've had a lot of wrestlers out there five, seven, eight years that have come through the school and have gotten more basic moves and holds and I'm glad to see it because it not only helps them, but it helps the students because they get to see more of the talent.

WP: Who's been through the school?

IK: Guys like Curtis Thompson, Tommy Angel comes often. There's a guy down here named the Stormtrooper. Every once in a while another wrestler will stop in. I've got one gentleman that's here now from Puerto Rico up and he's really something. He's a black belt in karate, black belt in judo, an amateur champion. He enters these tough men contests. His name is Julio. He's a young fella whose been through the ropes. I'm sending him to Japan. They had some tough matches over there. One of the offices over there has a lot of kick boxing.

WP: Speaking of Japan, you've taken several tours there. What's the difference between wrestling in Japan and in the United States?

IK: It depends which office you work for over there. I just got back last Saturday night. I was over there for one and a half weeks with Vladimir. I really enjoyed it. One thing I've noticed about Japan is you get to wrestle more international stars. You might get somebody from Europe over there, definitely Japanese wrestlers and they put us against each other a lot. American or someone from North America or South America against each other. The big thing I've noticed with Japanese audiences, up until lately anyway, they really responded a lot differently than they do here. If they see something they like or dislike, they just clap after it's done. There's not a lot of booing or cheering.

WP: They just appreciate what's going on in the ring?

IK: Right.

WP: Who did you work for in Japan?

IK: I went over for a new organization called WINGS. A friend of mine, little Victor from Puerto Rico, is behind it. He called me up to go over and it worked out very well. We sold out in Tokyo and the price of a ticket is like \$50.

WP: It seems more like a mainstream sport in Japan that it is over here.

IK: Yes. The basic sumo they have, being a national spots, that professional wrestling is just natural too. The Japanese seem to really love it. They follow us around on the train. They have all the wrestling magazines.

WP: Do you think something like that could occur in the United States?

IK: I think wrestling is always going to be around because people enjoy it. It's a combat type of thing. It is a sport as far as I'm concerned because it's just two individuals who go out there, they don't have a pre-arranged match. They just go out there and ad lib right down to the interviews. I mean your whole personality, everything, you become a character. It's not like Hollywood where you're given a line and you have a chance to re-take and do it over again. You have to go out and what's done is done.

WP: You always were a very strong interviewee. Was that a natural talent or something you worked on?

IK: I don't believe it was natural. The first couple of years, I was an introvert. I was very quiet and shy. They used to call me "stone face" because I was so quite and nervous. I believe it was something that just gradually came about.

WP: Did you always use the accent?

IK: Oh yes.

WP: Where did that come from?

IK: I guess it was a natural thing being raised around French people. Not being able to learn English properly because you move around to so many different areas and there's all different accents. I'm now down south and even my children are talking, "Y'all." It's molded out from all the different places I've lived.

WP: You're known for the Russian chain match. Where did that come from?

IK: I believe it was by accident at first. It was a thing where I wanted to settle a situation in a match, a feud type of thing. The first one I ever had as far as professional was against Bruno Sammartino. I especially liked it, although that night I was very fortunate the chain broke because he had it wrapped around the post outside and it was around my neck and he had his foot up on the turnbuckle, pulling and he was choking me out. I passed out. The only thing that saved me was my weight, when I fell to the floor, it broke the strap from my wrist.

WP: And you decided to have another one after that?

IK: Yes. As a matter of fact, I've had a couple since then. The original chain that I got, I passed it on to Nikita. I've got a new one, well it's 10 years old now. I enjoy the chain matches. It's something that I'm real good at. I'm used to it and not too many wrestlers are familiar with it so it gives me an advantage.

WP: Show them how it's done.

IK: Yeah. When you've got a 12 foot link chain that weighs 15 pounds, you get cracked across the face or head, it will knock your teeth out pretty quick. It comes flying back at you.

WP: One thing I want to ask you, with the Russian Chain matches, cage matches and other matches you've been in have been very violent and bloody. Doesn't that take a lot out of a person?

IK: Yeah, because you end up risking yourself more so than if you just used holds and ordinary maneuvers in the ring. You end up having a scaffold or a cage, you've got that extra obstacle that you've got to look out for. I've acquired 100 to 200 stitches because of the different matches like that.

WP: You were also in the original Tower of Doom match. Did you know what you were getting into?

IK: Yes, I did. It was explained to me and I was concerned with all that weight that it was going to collapse or fall over, but they assured me it was sturdy. It wasn't really that bad except you couldn't move around that much because your footing wasn't very good walking on that wire down there in some places it was down deep. Lumps all over and there was a danger you would fall down. I got struck in a couple of the layers with Ron Garvin and that's the wrong guy to get stuck with. A tough man.

WP: Who is your favorite wrestler?

IK: It used to Yukon Eric when I was a kid. He was a big powerful, strong man. As the years went on, not long after that, Bruno Sammartino had to definitely be one. I was a teenager at the time he was the main guy. He'd just come from Italy and was big and impressive. He definitely caught my eye. I never dreamed that one day I'd get to wrestle him. It turned out I went against him. I admire the man even to this day for what he stands for and what his feelings are about wrestling event today, disliking what is happening in the World Wrestling Federation and voicing it. I guess I would say a man like that, like Bruno. Other than him, there have been so many who are my friends and some who are not my friends, but I admire them and respect them. To pick one would be very hard to say who is my favorite. Some are real scientific. As far as scientific, it would have to be someone like Edouard Carpentier, who I really liked over the years. Nowadays, the wrestling has become so many more moves and holds. I like the Steiners. I think they are going to mature into something really big. There's so many to pick one would be really hard. But if there was one, it would have to be Bruno.

WP: Anything else you want to add?

IK: Not really, other than if there are any young people out there who feel they want to pursue wrestling or any sport to stay away from the drug situation because it prevalent and can definitely destroy not only your career, but your life. Young people out there looking at sports or anything in life, the big thing I want to press on them is to stay away from drugs of all kinds including alcohol because it is something I've seen no matter how wealthy a man can be or how successful he is, it can destroy him in no time at all.

WP: Thank you Ivan.

IK: My pleasure David.

Sidelines

Thanks To Wade Keller, Jeff Cohen and Jeff Mullins for the recent plugs. We are grateful for the kind support.

Wrestling Chatterbox is a monthly fan club oriented newsletter from Georgiann Makropoulous, offering a nice balance to hard news. It is available for \$2.00 an issue at 23-44 30th Drive, Astoria, NY 11102.

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The Man Who Saw The Future

By - The Phantom Of The Ring

Of all the wrestlers who passed away in 1991, none may be of more importance than Martin Karadajian, who died last August. Before you say "Martin who?" let me mention that while Dick the Bruiser and Wilbur Snyder were superstars of the game, Karadajian was the one who shaped it into what we know today, for better or for worse.

Karadajian was born outside Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1920. He bounced around playing soccer between jobs when he got involved in professional wrestling around 1942. He was moderately successful both under a hood and under his real name. When Antonio Rocca became such a hit in the United States, wrestling promoters were hit with a sudden fever for anything Argentinean, so Karadajian was brought here in hopes of becoming the next Rocca. It didn't happen. He never became anything more than a middle-of-the-card performer, whether wrestling under the moniker "The Mighty Karadajian" or as "The Great Karadajian." He stayed for most of the fifties, then departed for his native Argentina, bringing back nothing but memories. He went back to being on top in Argentina, wrestling main events against touring pros from all corners of the world, or simply as being billed as from all corners of the world. In the late sixties he retired and entered the promotional side of the business. By the time he took over as promoter, wrestling was dying in Argentina. Too much exposure, not enough talent, and payoffs too small to attract big names for tours. Karadajian was like every other businessman in that he wasn't especially fond of going out of business. He knew that the serious press in Argentina viewed wrestling as a joke, a human cartoon. So Karadajian reasoned, if they think it's a cartoon, why not give them a cartoon.

This he did, making wrestling into nothing more than an extended cartoon, complete with characters. The crowds, moved by the novelty of all this, began coming back into the arenas, accompanied by those all important wrestling consumers, the kids. Needless to say, this consumer loved the new product and soundly endorsed it with the pocketbook.

I was first exposed to this style of wrestling in 1981, when it debuted on UHF channel 47 in the old WWF time slot of Tuesday at 11:30 pm. Imagine my surprise when I saw this instead of the usual fare. It was different, no doubt about that. But was it wrestling? No, but then, that was the idea. I still remember some of the characters today. The lead heel was Genghis Khan, and the comedy was supplied by Pepito, a clown character. There was also the strangest gimmick I had ever seen, or probably will ever see: a wrestler simply called the Invisible Man. Of course, there was no such wrestler, and his opponents would be selling to thin air. It was like doing intricate choreography without a partner. I can't describe what it was like to see a wrestler pinned by the Invisible Man. Karadajian supplied the Invisible Man's grunts via a microphone taped under the middle of the ring.

The show played to little public notice, being dismissed as one of those nutty South American gimmicks. But according to Tom Burke, Vince McMahon Sr. mentioned to Mike LaBelle that Karadajian was definitely onto something. When we see what McMahon's son has done to the shape of wrestling, we begin to see that Karadajian has influenced wrestling much more than we could have suspected.

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